

# Bicentennial Revives Memory of First Utah Iron-Making Operation

In 1776, the year of American independence, a party of discouraged Spanish explorers led by Franciscan priests Escalante and Dominguez passed through what is now Iron County on its way back to Santa Fe after failing in the purpose to find a direct route to Monterey, California. If they saw the outcroppings of iron ore, later found by Mormon explorers, they failed to note it.

Seventy-six years later, the first pig iron made west of the Missouri River was produced by a crude blast near Cedar City, not far from where the Spanish fathers passed.

Soon after the Mormons arrived in the Great Basin, Brigham Young organized and dispatched exploring expeditions to discover what potentials the vast surrounding wilderness held.

One of these parties, led by Parley P. Pratt, discovered significant deposits of iron and coal in the southern part of the state during the winter of 1849-50. The expedition left Salt Lake City on Nov. 23, 1849, and returned on Feb. 1 the following year.

#### Brigham Elated

Pratt's discoveries were enthusiastically received. In his message to the legislature of Deseret on Dec. 2, 1850, President Young stressed the recent find of "inexhaustible beds of the very best of iron ore." He predicted "incalculable benefits from its development."

#### Damaging Cloudburst

The catastrophe was complete when a cloud burst in

from the first iron to shoe a horse. Later, a pair of hand-irons were made from the local iron.

#### Prospects Excellent

Four months later, Henry Lunt wrote to the Deseret News:

"The prospects of manufacturing that all-important iron is excellent. I would that we had five hundred good men at this time to develop the rich resources of this section. I am satisfied that iron to almost any amount would soon be manufactured. The machinery is of the best kind and works well. It would do for a much larger furnace than the one erected."

Encouraged, Mormon leaders issued a call to the L.D.S. mission in Great Britain to secure the men and capital to assist in the venture. The outcome was the organization at Liverpool of the Deseret Iron Company. The company raised some \$16,000 to carry forward its work.

Meanwhile, Brigham Young called for 100 families to strengthen the Cedar City colony during the general conference of the church in October, 1852. The group included mostly new converts to the church from England.

Just as prospects appeared to brighten, disaster struck the fledgling industry.

The outbreak of an Indian war in 1853 forced the settlers to stop operations and defend their lives.

#### Damaging Cloudburst

The catastrophe was

Col. A. S. Johnston in 1857 to enforce Federal law in the territory.

Ten years later, an attempt was made to revive ironmaking in Southern Utah

#### Revival Attempt

Ten years later, an attempt was made to revive ironmaking in Southern Utah when the Great Western Iron Manufacturing Company was organized in 1868. This venture began production in 1873 at Old Iron Town, west of Cedar City, and continued to operate for the next decade.

The crude blast furnace had an output of 2,400 pounds of pig iron every 24 hours, which was used to make stoves, grates, iron pots, frying pans, flat irons, buckets and other castings. Besides the blast furnace, auxiliary operations included a machine shop, engine house, pattern shop, foundry and store.

But, the Great Western Iron Manufacturing Company and a successor firm, Iron Manufacturing Company of Utah, failed to achieve a financially successful operation at Old Iron Town in 1883 the furnace was shut down.

Despite the failure of early attempts to make pig iron from Utah raw materials, the faith of early pioneers kept alive the hope that such an industry could be successfully established.

Their faith was fulfilled in 1924 when a 450-ton blast furnace and 33 coke ovens at the old Iron Town plant, two miles south of Provo on the old Spanish Trail highway, opened



SCATTERED RUINS in the sagebrush west of Cedar City bear silent testimony to the faith and perseverance of early Mormon pioneers who worked to build an iron industry in the wilderness

of Southern Utah more than a century ago. The first iron-making effort followed by 76 years the explorations in Utah by the Dominguez-Escalante party in 1776. Possibly the iron ore

outcroppings in Southern Utah did not attract the attention of the Spanish explorers, who traveled the general region en route home.

The expedition included 118 men, 30 of whom were accompanied by their families. The party also numbered two carriages, 101 wagons, 368 oxen, 100 horses, 12 mules, 146 cows, 20 beef cattle, 14 dogs, 18 cats and 121 chickens.

They named their first settlement Parowan. Their nearest white neighbors were 200 miles to the north with five intervening ranges of mountains.

Smith sent a small company of 35 settlers to begin the manufacture of iron. The group under Captain Henry Lunt settled Cedar City in November, 1851.

Plant Furnaces

foundation for a larger furnace which was completed that fall at a cost of \$3,782.45. Also that year they constructed four beehive coke ovens and started work on several others.

These efforts paid off, as

### Blast Furnace

Part of this small company provided shelter, plowed and planted, while the rest of the group — mostly men who had served as coal and iron workers in Scotland and Wales — prepared to make iron. Erection of the blast furnace was begun in February, 1852. April 19, 1855, when workers charged their new furnace and produced 24 hours later some 1,700 pounds of good iron. For the first time, the technique of ironmaking seemed to have been solved.

Other problems, however, continued to plague the

By fall, they were ready to start up an important new industry in the wilderness. According to the mission journal:

Labor was scarce. More men were needed to keep enough ore and coal on hand to maintain production. And dedication

"On the 29th of September the blast was put on the furnace and charged with iron ore that had been calcined. The fuel used was stone coal coked and dry pitch pine wood in the raw state.

alone could never make up for the lack of ironmaking skills using marginal raw materials.

In the winter, operations were brought to a standstill because the creek froze over and stopped the water wheel.

"On the morning of the 30th the furnace was tapped and a small quantity of iron run out, which caused the hearts of all to rejoice."

Burr Frost, a Parowan blacksmith made enough nails

blacksmith, made enough nails

... could be made  
especially successful in

While, the father of modern steel industry, Father Mathesius, then president of Geneva Steel Company, had this to say in about the early 1900's of Southern Utah:

In this earliest period of civilization, we find the beginning of Utah's

undertaken solely to  
an urgent local need, to  
make an essential metal for  
military and domestic use  
and for traps for buildings, so as  
to relieve the tasks of those, who,  
by their example, succeeded in the  
construction of the Salt Lake  
Temple without the aid of  
any magnificence.

This way, Brigham  
blast furnace venture  
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